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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE FOREIGN MINISTERS CALL FOR DISMANTLING MILITIAS IN IRAQ; ZEBARI URGES SUPPORT OF IRAQI SHIA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Arab League foreign ministers, meeting in Cairo on December 5, deplored the deteriorating security situation in Iraq, and called for the immediate dismantling of sectarian militias. Mubarak expressed support for Iraq, and welcomed Talabani's visit on December 12. Iraqi foreign minister Zebari says he is "satisfied" with the outcome of the AL meeting, and urges support for Iraqi Shia. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 5, Arab League foreign ministers from the AL's "Iraq Committee" (Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt) met in Cairo to discuss the deteriorating security situation in Iraq and the need for immediate steps to foster national reconciliation there. AL Secretary General Amre Moussa and Iraq Committee chairman Shaykh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa (Bahrain's foreign minister) said the ministers had agreed to a timetable for rebuilding Iraq's police and army prior to the withdrawal of coalition forces. In a press statement issued after their meeting, the foreign ministers condemned "terrorist and criminal acts" in Iraq, and called for the immediate dismantling of all militias in Iraq, and for the preservation Iraq's unity and identity. The statement said that the next AL conference on Iraq should be held in Baghdad within four months.

¶3. (SBU) In a telephone conversation on December 5, Iraqi foreign minister Zebari told the Ambassador that he had met earlier that day with President Mubarak. Zebari said he told Mubarak he had come "to correct relations" and urged support for Iraqi Shia to "feel part of the Arab nation." He said that Mubarak was supportive, and that he looked forward to welcoming Iraqi president Jalal Talabani when he visits Cairo on December 12. Mubarak also told Zebari that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki would be welcome "any time."

¶4. (SBU) Zebari described the meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers as "the usual long debates" conducted with "intense interest." He said he was very satisfied with the final statement which called for supporting the Iraqi government and the unity and integrity of Iraq, while condemning terrorism and "takfirism" (declaring someone to be an infidel). Zebari said he had parried AL calls for a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, urging instead a timetable for strengthening Iraqi security forces. He said that he stressed the need for the AL to accept and support Iraqi Shia, reassuring that their primary allegiance was to Iraq and not Iran. He said the ministers were apprehensive about the Baker report, but he underscored for them that President Bush will make the final decision and would not withdraw U.S. forces prematurely. (Note: Zebari departed Cairo early December 6 for Saudi Arabia. End note.)

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